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ABSTRACT

Proposals for changing sexist language, while having an increasing impact on patterns of language usage in America, have also continuously been argued against in the media and in academia during the 1970's. The proposals for eliminating the usage of masculine terms as "generics" have received the most criticism. In this paper, the various arguments that have been presented for retaining masculine/generic usage are illustrated and analyzed. The arguments are classified as follows: (1) the "cross-cultural" arguments; (2) the "language is a trivial concern" arguments; (3) the "freedom of speech/unjustified coercion" arguments; (4) the "sexist language is not sexist" arguments; (5) the "word-etymology" arguments; (6) the "appeal to authority" arguments; (7) the "change is too difficult, inconvenient, impractical or whatever" arguments; and (8) the "it would destroy historical authenticity and literary works" arguments. It is claimed that the arguments have been overlaid with ridicule and hostility towards feminists, and that they can be viewed as political rather than substantive. (Author/AMH)

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An analysis of classic arguments against changing sexist language[1]

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An analysis of classic arguments against changing sexist language

In the early 1970's, numerous discussions of the existence of sexism in language appeared in feminist publications, e. g., Dana Densmore (1970), Germaine Greer (1971), Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1972), Varda One (1971), and Emily Toth (1970). By the mid-1970's, numerous sets of guidelines for avoiding sexist language had appeared, e. g., McGraw-Hill Book Company (1974) and American Psychological Association (1975)[2]. Academicians in a variety of disciplines turned their attention to the issues concerning sexist language both as scholars and in response to the guidelines being proposed in their professional associations. Early scholarship on sexist language and related topics is well documented in an annotated bibliography by Nancy Henley and Barrie Thorne (1975); current work is continuously being documented in the newsletter, Women & Language News.[3] The issues concerning sexist language have also been extensively addressed in letters to editors and in columns in various newsletters, newspapers, and magazines.

The various proposals for changing sexist language that have been put forward in the writings of feminists and academicians and in the guidelines of publishers and professional associations have been classified according to their underlying rationale by Maija S. Blaubergs (1978 a)[4] as follows: 1) indirect change; 2) change via circumvention; and 3) change via emphasis on feminine terms. Blaubergs concludes that

> The latter two approaches both recognize the nongenericness of masculine terms, but the second approach requires neutral or new terms, while the third requires the use of both feminine and masculine terms in parallel or with added emphasis on the feminine. (p. 259)

While the proposals for changing sexist language have been the subject of extensive debate, it is specifically the proposals that question the genericness of masculine terminology that have been most negatively received, i.e., 1) proposals for changing masculine/generic terms such as man, mankind, chairman to clearly neutral terms such as person, humankind, chairperson; 2) proposals for changing the usage of masculine/generic terms to parallel usage of clearly sex-specific terms such as woman/man, womankind/mankind, chairwoman/chairman; 3) proposals for changing the usage of masculine pronouns (he, his, him, himself) as alleged generic pronouns to the usage of a clearly neutral form such as they-singular or any of a long list of newly-coined neutral pronouns; and 4) proposals for changing the usage of the masculine pronouns as alleged generic pronouns to a pattern of usage in which the feminine pronouns are used in accurate reference to females while the masculine pronouns are retained for use in reference to males.

A number of detailed discussions of the issue of the use of masculine terms and pronouns as alleged generics have attempted to clarify many of the misconceptions concerning this issue, e.g., Maija S. Blaubergs (1975), Ann Bodine (1975), Cynthia Butler (1977), Julia Stanley (1975a), Norma Shepelak (1977), and Jeanette Silveira (1978). Additionally, experimental investigations of the actual interpretation and current usage patterns of generics are rapidly accruing, e.g., William Green (1978), Wendy Martyna (1978), Marty Salter (1979), Schneider and Hacker (1973), and Kathy Svertfeger (1979). The following quote from Julia Stanley (1975b) states the issue succinctly: "The arguments that favor man and mankind as generics are not substantive, but political." (p. 2) The following observation from William Green (1978) illustrates the current status of pronoun usage by college students: "Evidently, many already regard plural pronouns as normal usage after singular nouns of unspecified gender." (p. 152)

In this paper, I will document the various arguments that have been put forth during the 1970's for retaining and/or enforcing the usage of masculine terms as generics. Some of the arguments have specifically addressed individual proposals for change, e.g., "of course, he is correct, for generic he is generally regarded including female persons" (William Green, 1978, p. 150); "'Man' is...not distinguished as to sex..." (Jill McCurley, 1977, p. 5) Other arguments against change have been much more general, e.g., "The thesis about sexist language is acceptable...only if one accepts the broader thesis that there is a necessary correlation between the structures of society and those of language." (George Tavard, 1977, p. 128] I have classified the various arguments against changing sexist language as follows: 1) the "cross-cultural arguments; 2) the "language is a trivial concern" arguments; 3) the "freedom of speech/unjustified coercion "arguments; 4) the "sexist language is not sexist" arguments; 5) the "word-etymology" arguments; 6) the "appeal to authority" arguments; 7) the "change is too difficult, confusing, inconvenient, impractical or whatever" arguments; and 8) the "it would destroy historical authenticity and literary works" arguments. These arguments have previously been identified and briefly documented in Maija S. Blaubergs (1978b). Each of the above-listed categories of arguments presented by those opposing changing sexist language during the 1970's will now be documented and discussed in turn.

THE "CROSS-CULTURAL" ARGUMENTS

The cross-cultural arguments appear in several forms. The general form of the argument has been stated by George Tavard (1977) as follows:

> If language was an ideology, and sexist language in particular was the ideology of male power, one should expect to find a fairly stable correlation between degrees of feminine subservience in society and degrees of sexism in language. (p. 129)

Other opponents of change refer to specific societies or cultures, the language of which is less sexist than English, for example, but in which the status of women is considered to be even less equal to men than in the United States, for example. Einar Haugen (1977a) makes this point, though cautiously, as part of his discussion of sexism and the Norwegian language:

> It is perhaps too facile to reply that women can hardly be said to have a higher position in society where languages are spoken like Japanese, Chinese, Eskimo, or Tamil, which do not make gender distinctions. (p. 90)

Similarly, Sandy Whiteley (1972) has argued as follows:

> Turkish, for instance, is devoid of grammatical gender.... There is one pronoun, o, meaning he, she or it....Yet what does this tell us about the place of women in Turkish society? Nothing, really. I'd like to see some cross-cultural studies of the effects of language on sex roles before we start dismantling the English language. (p. 14)

Another version of the cross-cultural argument involves dialect variations within the English language. This version is exemplified in a letter to the editor of the Newsletter of the American Anthropological Association by Joseph F. Foster (1972). Foster describes the Ozark Mountain Dialect as one in which they-singular rather than the masculine pronouns is used in reference to sex-indeterminate antecedents. He then presents his argument as follows:

> From the point of view of the antisexism-in-language movements, the interesting thing about this dialect is who speaks it. I have no statistical information on this question, but I confess to a compelling impression that people who speak this liberated dialect are highly

> unlikely to be among those people sympathetic to the antisexist movements. (p. 4)

The final form of the cross-cultural argument focuses on the similarities between women and other oppressed groups. The contention is that if one oppressed group is oppressed by language, others must also be, or none are. George Tavard (1977) has elaborated this argument to its fullest:

> Not only women have been dominated by society, so have slaves, minority groups, minority races, underdeveloped tribes, the proletariat, "natives" in colonial countries, the undereducated everywhere. The thesis about sexist language is acceptable...only if one accepts the broader thesis that there is a necessary correlation between the structures of society and those of language. (p. 128)

The general issue of the influence of language on thought and societal practices (known as "linguistic relativity" or the "Whorfian hypothesis") has long been debated. Einar Haugen (1977b) and Jeanette Silveira (1978) have recently given divergent interpretations of the history and status of that debate. However, the debate concerning linguistic relativity is irrelevant to the issue of changing sexist language if sexism is to be eliminated, since, whether language merely reflects existing societal practices or contributes significantly to them, sexist language by its existence <u>reinforces</u> and <u>socializes</u> sexist thinking and practices. The reason for changing sexist language that has been misunderstood is that the language <u>itself</u> is sexist.

THE "LANGUAGE IS A TRIVIAL CONCERN" ARGUMENTS

Some opponents of changing sexist language have argued that despite language being sexist, changing it is a strategical error in eliminating sexism in general. This argument has two components: 1) including language

among the other aspects of sexism will detract from the perceived seriousness of the other injustices, or 2) that the limited energies of feminists could be better spent in addressing other forms of sexism. The first component of the argument is evident in the following quote from Phillip Howard (as cited by Alfred Friendly, 1978):

> While the lunatic fringe of women's liberation strain at such semantic gnats as neuter pronouns, it swallows the whole male chauvinist camel of real injustice to women. The prejudiced, unenlightened and unjust are enabled to treat real injustice as if it were as trivial as the fuss about chairpersons.

An anonymous male university professor (quoted by Barbara Bate, 1976) expresses a similar viewpoint:

> But I really think that too much has been made of this sexist language business. Hell, that's not the way to win a battle, by shooting ping-pong balls at people. (p. 16)

George Tavard (1977) gives similar advice to feminists:

> (T)he woman movement should not be satisfied with surface adjustments of our spoken tongues....The demand should be a reform in depth of our symbolisms, social, political, cultural, esthetic, and, yes, religious and theological. (p. 138)

Stefan Kanfer (1972) also focuses on the inadequancy of changing sexist language as part of his argument against such change:

> (I)f society is sexist, is it altered when its language is revised...Changing chairman to chairperson is mock doctrine and flaccid democracy, altering neither the audience nor, in fact, the office holder. (p. 79)

If sexist language is indeed a trivial concern for these individuals, it is puzzling why changing it should be so vigorously opposed by them. Shirley Gorenstein (1972) has expressed a somewhat different viewpoint on the inclusion of sexist language as a concern of feminists:

> I have read with increasing pain the letters in the Newsletter concerned with "sexist vocabulary." The pain comes from the recognition that the letters are expressing covertly the view that the feminist movement is silly and can be reduced to absurdity just as "feminist vocabulary" can be. (p. 8)

Moreover, it is not uncommon for feminists themselves to contend that sexist language can and should be overlooked, e.g., Jeanette Silveira (1978), in the introduction to her paper on generic-masculine words, states:

> I have written the paper because I have been intrigued by the great resistance I have encountered, even among the feminist and/or radical, to taking seriously the sexism of G-M words. (p. 1)

The Association for Women in Psychology Ad Hoc Committee on Sexist Language (1975) has both pointed out the prevalence of the "language is a trivial concern" argument and endeavored to refute it:

> The major objection, often even to discussing changing sexist language, is that it is a superficial matter compared with the real physical and economic oppression of women. And indeed, women's total oppression must end; we are not suggesting any diversion of energies from that struggle. We are, however, suggesting that this is an important part of it. (p. 16)

Overall, for "a trivial concern," sexist language has received an inexplicable amount of attention in both academia and the media, and an inordinate degree of resistance to change.

THE "FREEDOM OF SPEECH/UNJUSTIFIED COERCION" ARGUMENTS

There is a set of arguments against changing sexist language that completely bypass the issues of the validity and importance of the proposals for change, and concentrate instead on the allegation that the proponents of change are threatening or coercing others to change their language usage. It is both the proponents of change and their tactics that have been disparaged. The following sarcastic diatribes against the proponents of change, i. e., feminists, are typical:

> (W)e men had better play it safe and respect the ladies' persondate to reform the language for their own purposes.... (W)e are sure to be personhandled by some wopersons if we don't. (Calvin Brown, 1973, p. 8c)
>
> (I)f I were speaking to an audience of really dyed in the wool feminists I would probably try to avoid words like "mankind" and "man, the study of," simply because it's easier to avoid a fight. (An anonymous female university professor, quoted in Barbara Bate, 1976, p. 11)
>
> The lunatic fringe of the women's "liberation" movement has struck agin, this time at the Bible....What is really being asked here is that, under a false pretext of translation, a group of feminist crusaders rewrite the Bible to make it say what they want it to. People are to be shamelessly manipulated and objectivity, truth, and justice are to be cynically sacrificed. (Calvin Brown, 1976, p. 4)

> (I)t seems that a multitude of terrorized individuals and institutions (including state legislatures) have set about mangling perfectly neuter and valid words like foreman and motorman....The principal counterfeiters--let us be frank about it at the outset--are the less sensible activists of the women's rights movement; the users are those who are cravenly intimidated by them. (Alfred Friendly, 1978)
>
> "Sexism in textbooks may be a hot topic with ladies who like Ms. in front of their names, but not with school administrators. (Albert Kingston and Terry Lovelace, 1977a)

In these quotations the focus of the argument is clearly on the proponents of change who are described as deviants while their tactics are described as inappropriately coercive. However, not only feminists, but also publishing companies and professional associations have proposed changes in language usage. Albert Kingston and Terry Lovelace (1977ab) have extensively criticized the implementation of such guidelines, e. g., they argue that

> (P)ublishers and professional societies seem to have succumbed to the pressures of those who allege that traditional educational texts and basal readers are sexist in nature....Censorship is an ugly word. Whether or not those who subscribe to these principles realize it, these guidelines constitute a form of censorship! (Albert Kingston and Terry Lovelace, 1977b, pp. 90. 92)
>
> (T)he terms regulations and standards might be more appropriate, since articles not conforming to these "guidelines" are returned to authors for revision. (Albert Kingston and Terry Lovelace, 1977a p. 151)

Significantly, while publishers typically require adherence to some set of stylistic guidelines, e. g., The American Psychological Association (1974) specifies that "Authors must prepare their manuscripts to conform to the content and style requirements of the current Publication Manual, " (p. 102)

it is only the guidelines for nonsexist language usage that Kingston and Lovelace are objecting to, not the existence of publication manuals.

THE "SEXIST LANGUAGE IS NOT SEXIST" ARGUMENTS

Another cluster of arguments against changing sexist language are those concerned with the issue of the reality of the existence of sexist language. Some of these arguments focus on the allegedly nonsexist intentions of the users of masculine/generic terms while others focus on the allegedly false interpretation given to such terms by the proponents of change. The following quotations involve both kinds of arguments:

> I suspect that much denunciation of sexist language in others reveals the bias of the hearer rather than that of the speaker. (George Tavard, 1977, p. 136)
>
> There are those, however, who insist along with novelist Anthony Burgess that purity of intention is enough to guarantee both clarity and equity. Burgess is among those who maintain that their usage of the generic masculine is neutral; that "women force chauvinistic sex onto the word." (Wendy Martyna, 1978, p. 138)
>
> Language that reinforces sexism can spring from...imprecise word choices...(which) may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory, or demeaning even if they are not intended to be. (Guidelines for nonsexist language in APA journals, 1977, p. 488)

The contention that proponents of changing sexist language unnecessarily interpret language as sexist indicates either ignorance of, misunderstanding of, or denial of the validity of the detailed explanations[5] by linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and others of the sexism inherent in the use of masculine terms as alleged generics. However, some opponents of changing sexist language

have contended that ignorance of word etymology is what is responsible for the belief that some language usage is sexist.

THE "WORD-ETYMOLOGY" ARGUMENTS

The word-etymology arguments all involve the historical meanings of specific words. For example, Louis Jay Herman (1972) has contended that

> The use of man and mankind to refer to the human species as a whole is by no means "sexist" in origin; the word man has been linked by many etymologists with mind, and the meaning "human being"... long antedates the specific application to the male of the species. (p. 14)

A newspaper columnist has offered the following the following interpretation of a listing in an etymological dictionary:

> "Man" is the unmarked form in English. Since nobody ever listens to me, here goes again: "Man" is the unmarked form in English, that is, not distinguished as to sex....Even the Oxford English Dictionary agrees with me, giving as its first entry: "...a human being (irrespective of age or sex)." (Jill McCurley, 1977, p. 5)

Julia Stanley (1975b) also consulted the Oxford English Dictionary and came to the following conclusion:

> The Oxford English Dictionary states clearly in its definition of man that generic usage of the noun is "obsolete," and the editors go on to note that "in modern apprehension man as thus used primarily denotes the male sex... " (p. 2)

Maija S. Blaubergs (1978a) has previously identified the word-etymology argument as a fallacious one:

> The main criticism of this argument is that word meanings do change

> despite their origins, and it is their current meaning, including their connotative meaning, that is most relevant to the kinds of change under discussion. (p. 247)

Varda One (1971) has identified a number of other historical changes in word meaning similar to the change involved in the definition of man: harlot once meant a fellow of either sex; whore once meant a lover of either sex; wench once meant a child of either sex; and girl once meant a young person of either sex. Individuals contending that man is correct usage in reference to females do not contend that harlot, whore, wench, and girl are correct usage in reference to males although the words once were so used. Thus, the word-etymology argument appears to be specific to the usage of masculine terms as generics. The argument alleges for those terms and those terms only that because they historically were not sex-specific, their correct usage is what is once was. Julia Stanley (1975a) has further criticized the contention concerning "correct usage," claiming that it "merely reflects the long tradition of male presumption and arrogance first recorded for us in Genesis." (p. 3) She elaborates her claim as follows:

> The usage of man, mankind, and he in the early grammars of English was not generic in any sense of that terms, however one might wish to construe it. Men were the educated ruling class in England, and these first descriptions of English usage and structure were written with the male sex as their only audience. (pp. 11-12)

Thus, the word-etymology for retaining the usage of masculine terms as alleged generics has been questioned in terms of the specificity of its application only to such terms, its logic in contending that historical

meanings are the correct current meanings, and the accuracy of the etymological data.[6]

The focus on correct usage and the reference to etymological dictionaries in the manifestations of the word-etymology arguments suggest they may appropriately be considered a sub-class of the appeal-to-authority arguments.

THE "APPEAL TO AUTHORITY" ARGUMENTS

While the word-etymology arguments involve an appeal to authority, the authority itself, the dictionary, has been identified by some researchers as a major contributor to sexism in language, e. g., Henny Lee Gershuny (1973), Julia Stanley (1975a), and Ruth Todasco (1973). Todasco has proposed a "Feminist English Dictionary" and entitled Volume One "An intelligent woman's guide to dirty words: English words and phrases reflecting sexist attitudes toward women in patriarchal society, arranged according to usage and idea." In the introduction, she specifies the need for such a work as follows:

> It is hoped, for the sake of humankind, that lexicographers will be jarred to perceive the prejudice inherent in their scholarship. Perhaps they will recognize that to date the discipline of scholarship has been a ritual celebrating patriarchal man's sense of himself. (p. ii)

Certainly, "authorities" on usage have not held back in including their opinions rather than presenting the facts of usage. A classic example comes from the entry in A dictionary of modern English usage by H. W. Fowler (1927) for "feminine designations":

> This article is intended as a counter-protest. The authoress, poetess, & paintress, & sometimes the patroness & the inspectress, take exception to the indication of sex in these designations. They regard the distinction as derogatory to them & as implying inequality between the sexes....These ladies neither are nor pretend to be making their objection in the interests of the language or of people in general; they object in their own interests only....(W)ith the coming extension of women's vocations, feminines for vocation-words are a special need of the future; everyone knows the inconvenience of being uncertain whether a doctor is a man or a woman; hesitation in establishing the word doctress is amazing. (pp. 176-177)

Authorities other than dictionaries have also been invoked by the opponents of change. A classic example is the following statement by Robin Lakoff (1975), a linguist:

> I think in any case that linguists should be consulted before any more fanciful plans are made public for reforming the inequities of English. (p. 45)

However, Julia Stanley (1975a), also a linguist, has the following to say about linguists as authorities on usage:

> As the quotations from recent linguistics texts illustrate.... (u)sage is still what is taught under the guise of data, and it's still male usage that we teach in our linguistics courses. (p. 30)

Recently, Stanley (1978) has challenged the objectivity of linguists further;

> Drawing upon recent research on sexism in English and the ways

> in which social forces affect language structure, I will show how prescriptive statements about English have been incorporated into linguistic grammars as "descriptions" of language. More insidiously, judgments based on prescriptive assumptions have been put forth as "linguistic universals." (p. 2)

Thus, the response to the appeal to authority arguments has been a questioning of the objectivity of the authorities as well as their data base: the language of men. Madeleine Mathiot (1975), for one, has demonstrated major differences in the usage patterns of women and men for the feminine, masculine, and neuter pronouns. Marty Salter (1979) has shown that the usage of the feminine, masculine, and neuter pronouns as generics is interpreted differently for female vs. male speakers. Thus, the appeal to authority arguments closely tie in the research on sexist language with that on the language of women. The appeal to authority arguments label some aspects of nonsexist language usage as deviant; similarly, women's language usage has been labelled as deviant from the normative (male) pattern. To appeal to the traditional authorities on language usage appears to overlook the fact that it is the traditional authorities that proponents of changing sexist language are challenging.

THE "CHANGE IS TOO DIFFICULT, INCONVENIENT, IMPRACTICAL, OR WHATEVER" ARGUMENTS

There is a cluster of arguments that appear to acknowledge to some extent the sexist aspects of language, but that consider sexist language to be a necessary (or at least unavoidable) evil. To some extent, this approach is similar to the one that recognizes sexism in language but rates it as less important than other forms of sexism.

Some opponents of change have isolated the pronoun system as too difficult

to change. Robin Lakoff (1975) has presented this argument as follows:

> (C)ertain aspects of the language are...too common, too thoroughly mixed throughout the language, for the speaker to be aware each time he uses....My feeling is that this area of pronominal neutralization is both less in need of changing and less open to change than many of the other disparities. (p. 45)

Lakoff's position is echoed in the following observation by the Association for Women in Psychology Ad Hoc Committee on Sexist Language (1975):

> Another argument for the impossibility of change says that while many lexical items may change, a pronoun system is at a deeper level and much more resistant to change. (p. 16)

The arguments that change is too difficult, inconvenient, or whatever frequently appear in introductory statements by authors who attempt to justify their usage of masculine/generic terms in their books. The following examples illustrate their logic and sentiment:

> To avoid confusion and repetition men and women who practice the art (of Kung Fu) will be referred to as Kung Fu men. (M. Minick, 1975)

> In some cases, for the convenience of the reader, we have allowed the ubiquitous <u>he</u> its traditional priority, but we wish to point out that in such instances it is not our insensitivity to sexism in language but our consideration for the smooth flow of prose that have governed the decision. (G. S. Belkin and J. L. Gray, 1977, p. xv)

> Masculine pronouns are used throughout the book for the sake of grammatical uniformity and simplicity. They are not meant to be preferential or discriminatory. (R. L. Schiefelbusch, 1978, p. 5)

The Winter 1979 issue of Women and Language News lists some additional similar arguments as "generic apologia."

Another manifestation of the argument comes from Emily Post's column in Good Housekeeping as part of her response to a reader's criticism of her usage of newspaper-deliveryman, mailman, milkman, laundry or cleaning man, doorman, and handyman:

> Nor do I think it is practical to have to list "the people who deliver the milk, the laundry and the newspaper; the person who opens the door; and the person who cleans the halls." (Emily Post, 1978, pp. 70, 72)

Unfortunately, even some of the guidelines for nonsexist language have included versions of this argument, notably the Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals (1977):

> Changed his to his or her; however, use sparingly to avoid monotonous repetition. Her or his may also be used, but it sounds awkward. In either case, keep pronoun order consistent to avoid ambiguity. (p. 490)

The guidelines of Macmillan (1975) also include a statement on the difficulty of change:

> The English language makes it extremely difficult to use phrases that are both grammatically acceptable and non-sexist. (p. 18)

However, six pages of recommended nonsexist phrases follow this statement. The "Final Word" of the Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals (1977) may be construed as similarly mitigating their impact concerning the desirability of change, or rather too much change:

> Attempting to introduce nonsexist language at the cost of awkwardness, obscurity, or euphemistic phrasing does not improve scientific communication....Any endeavor to change

> the language is an awesome task at best. Some aspects of our language that may be considered sexist are firmly embedded in our culture, and we presently have no acceptable substitutes. In English, the use of third-person singular pronouns is one example....Nevertheless, with some rephrasing and careful attention to meaning, even the generic he can be avoided most of the time.

All of the foregoing quotations include some recognition of sexist language along with a justification for not making too much of a change. Of relevance to the issue of the difficulty of idiolectal change when it is actually attempted are the comments of Cathryn Adamsky's (1976) students who tried to use she rather than he generically:

> I thought it would be hard at first to write she instead of he...but I didn't find it all that difficult....
> At first I thought I'd never be able to change he to she but now I find that there was really no drastic change....
> The most important thing to me was that it wasn't hard to change at all....
> It was not difficult once I was in the habit of doing it. (pp. 6-7)

THE "IT WOULD DESTROY HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY AND LITERARY WORKS" ARGUMENTS

The final set of arguments against changing sexist language to be presented here are those that allege that changing sexist language would involve the rewriting of literary works, the idioms of the language, and even historical documents. Such rewriting would, according to the proponents of these arguments, destroy the value, authenticity, purity, elegance, precision, etc. of written works. Calvin Brown (1973) presents the argument by claiming

that "'What a piece of work is a person' doesn't merit an exclamation point at the end." (p. 8c) unlike the original version "What a piece of work is a man!" In a later article, Brown (1976) again presents the argument, this time in connection with proposals for retranslating the Bible:

> Even while we berate the writers of the Old Testament for not being Twentieth-century womenslibbers, we hypocritically demand perversions of their language to pretend that they really were. (p. 4)

Stefan Kanfer (1972) as part of his arguments against change compiled a lengthy list of changed idioms and phrases from literary works, e. g., "put up his duchesses," "Four Horsepersons of the Apocalypse," and "his gander was cooked." Brown (1976) interspersed his other comments with similarly changed idioms, e. g., "sauce for the saucy goose!" Albert Kingston and Terry Lovelace (1977) focus on literary works in their version of the arguments against change: they warn against "the attempt to purge educational materials of alleged sexist writing" as "[n literature, the 'ideal' often makes for saccharine reading." (p. 134)

Related arguments focus on the "precision," "felicity," and "purity" of traditional masculine/generic terms, e. g.,

> with a view to precision of language, and most of all to avoid the infelicity of a "chairperson' (Jill McCurley, 1977, p. 5)

> In general, feminist suggestions have been put down and categorized as illicit tampering with the language, as fads or as grotesque errors in a class with ain't and double negatives, depending upon the degree to which the writer identifies himself as the last bastion in defense of the "purity" of the English language. (Julia Stanley, 1975b, p. 3)

CONCLUSION

The resistance to changing sexist language that first appeared in response to feminists who identified the existence of sexism in language in the early 1970's is also occcurring in response to the various guidelines for eliminating sexist language that have been adopted by many publishers and professional associations. Those who argue against change often overlay their arguments with ridicule and hostility towards feminists. The arguments themselves can be viewed as more political than substantive if closely scrutinized. The vehemence and continued offering of the arguments against change can be interpreted as one indication that change has occurred and is continuing to occur both in idiolectal usage and in statements of the appropriateness of the usage of nonsexist language. For example, in 1979, for the first time, the program of the meeting of the American Educational Research Association included the following statement:

> Presentations should be edited in conformance with the "Guidelines for Non-Sexist Language in APA Journals"... according to AERA Publications' Policy. Statements of implications of sex/age, ethnic.religious, etc. derogation should likewise be eliminated. (p. 10)

However, consistent with the processes of language change that have been reported historically, nonsexist language forms and usage patterns now coexist with earlier forms and resistance to the new usage will continue on the part of some individuals. The study of such resistance may add significantly to the understanding of the social nature of language and to the bases of anti-feminism.

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NOTES

1. This paper is a revision of a paper presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Women's Studies Association, Johnson City, Tennessee, February 1979.
2. See Maija S. Blaubergs and Marilyn Partridge Rieger (1979) for a comprehensive, annotated listing of such guidelines.
3. Women & Language News has been published by the Linguistics Department, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 94305 U. S. A. since January 1976.
4. This article is a recipient of Honorable Mention in the first annual Research on Women in Education Award presented by Women Educators at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada, March 1978.
5. Such explanations may be found in Maija S. Blaubergs (1975), Jeanette Silveira (1978), and Julia P. Stanley (1975ab).
6. Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1976) contend both that man once did mean "a human being irrespective of sex or age" and that male domination in society was responsible for the change in meaning to "an adult male, especially" such that "the very ambiguity of the word is what makes it a useful tool for those who have a stake in maintaining the status quo." (p. 38)